Alternative route for Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra

1066. SHRI SANJAY RAUT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of pilgrims who visited Kailash-Mansarovar since last two years;

(b) whether Government have made any request to the Chinese Government for opening an alternative route for the Yatra through Ladakh, which would be shorter and more convenient to the Indian pilgrims; and

(c) if so, the details of response received from Chinese counterpart so far and the details of the steps taken by Government for opening of an alternative route for Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) 529 pilgrims performed the Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra in 2005, while 592 pilgrims undertook the Yatra in 2006.

(b) and (c) Government have proposed to the Chinese side, the opening of an alternative route to Kailash-Mansarovar through Demchok in Jammu and Kashmir. During the visit of the Chinese President Hu Jintao to India in November last year, the two sides agreed to explore the possibility of opening an additional route for the Yatra.

PoWs of 1965 and 1971 in Pakistani jails

1067. SHRI DARA SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Indian prisoners who were taken as prisoners during Indo-Pak wars in 1965 and 1971 and are still languishing in Pakistani jails;

(b) whether during his visit to Islamabad in January, 2007 he *inter-alia* discussed with President of Pakistan regarding expeditious release of such PoWs who have completed their prison terms; and

(c) if so, the details of such talks/decision held/taken by both sides for the release of prisoners as well as to ensure that human treatment is accorded to prisoners in jails?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) As per the available information there are 74 Indian PoWs in Pakistan jails, including 54 since 1971-72. Pakistan, however, does not acknowledge the presence of any PoW in its jails.

(b) Government have been pressing Pakistan Government to accept a visit by the families of the missing defence personnel to various jails in Pakistan. The matter was taken up again during EAM's visit to Pakistan in January 2007. This time Pakistan accepted the suggestion. Government have proposed the visit of a delegation to Pakistan in April 2007.

(c) During EAM's visit to Pakistan, India and Pakistan agreed to establish a committee on prisoners comprising retired judges of the superior judiciary to visit jails in the two countries and propose steps to ensure humane treatment and expedite the release of prisoners who have completed their prison terms.

Amritsar-Lahore bus service

1068. KUMARI NIRMALA DESHPANDE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) what is the occupancy in the Amritsar-Lahore bus Service;

(b) the reasons for low occupancy; and

(c) the steps being taken to have full occupancy?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (c) The Amritsar-Lahore bus service is operated by Punjab Roadways. Its average occupancy is reported to be around 30-35%. High fare, availability of more convenient alternative modes of travel and the time taken in getting visa for Pakistan and security clearance are possible reasons for the low occupancy.

Attack on Tamils in Sri Lanka

1069. DR. K. MALAISAMY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Sri Lankan Air Force and Army are indiscriminately attacking the Tamils there during the current war between